

# *An ambitious goal*

## Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer

It's easy to complain about the status of postsecondary education in Kentucky. The number of Kentuckians age 25-64 with bachelor's degrees is far less than the national average. In 2004, the number was 18.8 percent, compared with 29.1 percent nationwide, according to U.S. census figures, as reported recently in the Lexington Herald-Leader. In a rapidly changing, technology-based world, lack of postsecondary training dulls Kentucky's ability to compete and thrive. ...

Kentucky is trying to match the national figure of 32 percent of adults with bachelor's degrees projected for 2020. Improving by 14 percentage points in 14 years will be a daunting task, requiring that this state's public and private colleges and universities dramatically increase the number of graduates they are producing each year and keep it up for a long time.

Can it be done? Based on what we've seen this month on the campuses of Kentucky's public universities, it seems quite possible.

To say the least, May produced a bumper crop of college and university

graduates across Kentucky. And even if the big class of '06 turns out to be an unsustainable anomaly, it has to be encouraging because of the sheer interest Kentuckians are showing in higher education.

Seven of the eight public universities increased the number of degrees they awarded compared with last year, a 12.3 percent jump overall. Five years ago Kentucky public universities awarded just more than 14,000 degrees and other credentials. This year the number was nearly 24,000. That's a 68 percent increase in five years and a 20 percent increase from 2005 to 2006.

Western Kentucky University ... led the 2006 boom with an astounding 27.6 percent increase in degrees awarded, continuing the school's pattern of rapid growth this decade.

Kentucky will have to average a 4.5 percent annual increase in bachelor's degrees to meet the 2020 goals. If 2006 is any indication, it is within reach because Kentucky citizens appear to be getting the message about the vital importance of higher education.